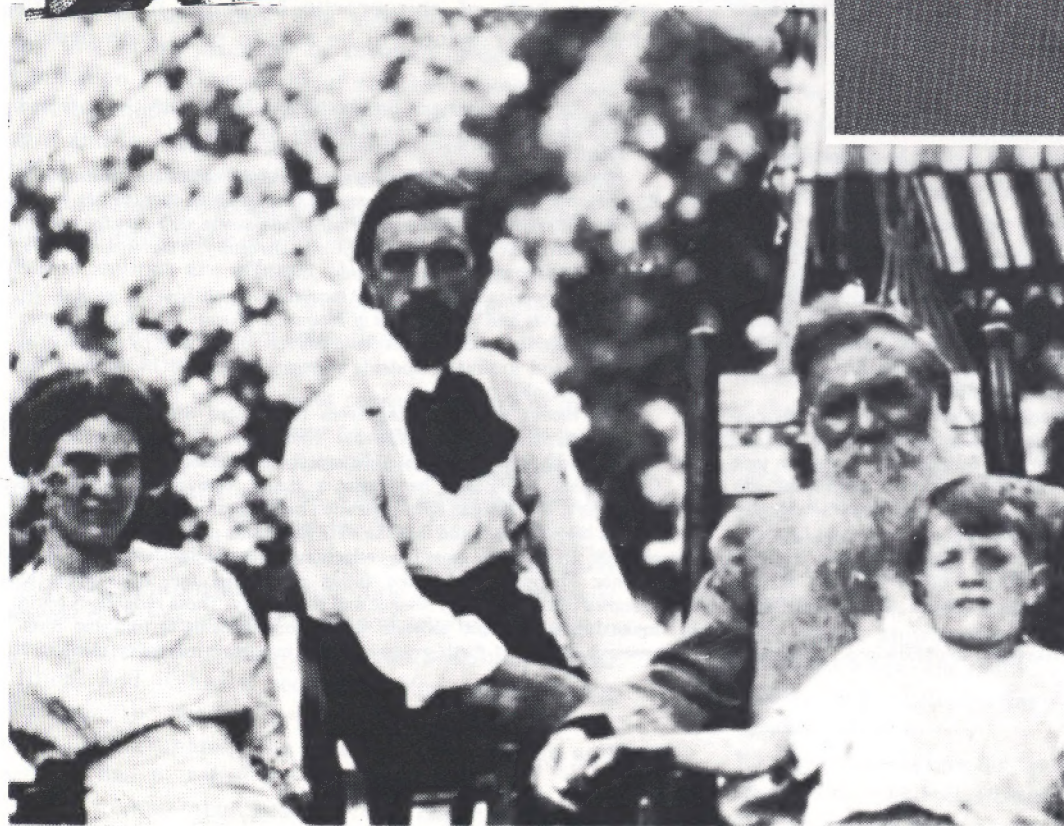
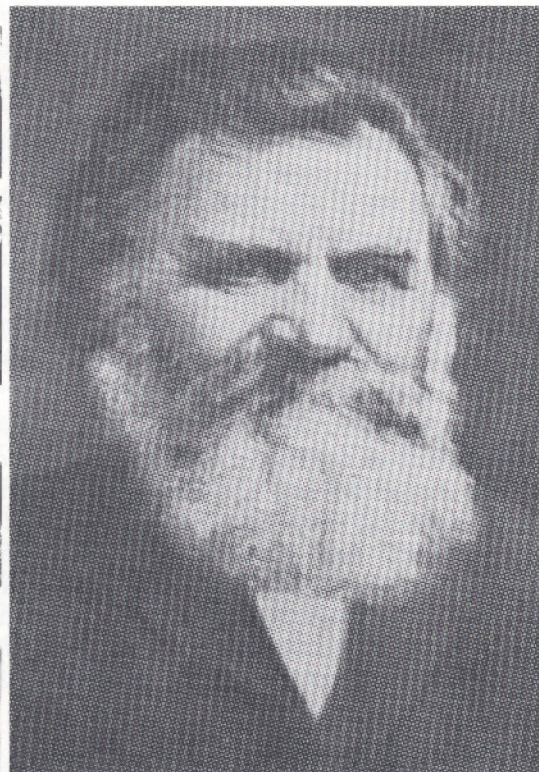


# DR. PALMER'S CHIROPRACTIC School and Cure

COR. SECOND AND BRADY STS.

Davenport, Iowa. *Apr. 4*

1901



Left: The Palmers (Mabel, B.J., D.D. and David) in 1913 photo. The Three Generations who charted the profession for most of its history. Above: The Founder (1845-1913) in a turn-of-the-century photo. Above left: Early faculty of Palmer School, circa 1906, when D.D. Palmer (standing second row left) departed and left the school to son B.J. (rear center, in front of window).



# Daniel David Palmer: Rediscovering the Frontier Years, 1845-1887

VERN GIELOW\*

A quite different biographical account of the Founder of Chiropractic, it covers the nontraditional aspects of his education in the wilds of Port Perry, Ontario, and his 12-year odyssey that led him to Davenport, Iowa and the threshold of the 1895 discovery.

In 1895, all of the life experiences of one man focused with an unexpected result. The combination of unusual circumstances of education, formal and informal, of theological persuasion, of work as an apiarist, horticulturist and magnetic healer, summed with the creation of an anomalous healing revolution — chiropractic.

Daniel David Palmer was born on March 7, 1845, to Thomas and Catherine McVay Palmer in Port Perry, Ontario. Thomas Palmer earned a livelihood as a grocer and shoemaker. He also served on the local board of education and as postmaster in the community.

His early education was received under the tutorage of a brutish taskmaster, John Black. By the time D. D. Palmer was eleven years old he and his brother, Thomas J., nine, both had received the equivalent of an eighth grade education and were on the academic trail of high school subjects including natural sciences and classical languages.<sup>1</sup>

On February 21, 1908, D. D. recalled his educational background as he lectured in Oklahoma City. He recalled that to education, I was very much overcrowded in my early life. I was studying Latin and Greek and higher mathematics at the age of eleven years, but in later life my advantages in education were limited."<sup>2</sup>

Formal learning was abruptly ended with the failure of the elder Palmer's business. The couple with four of their children moved to the United States in 1856. Left behind to work in a stove and match factory were D. D. and his brother, Thomas J.

On April 3, 1865, the two brothers left Canada for the United States. The nation was rebuilding following the Civil War and jobs were plentiful. The brothers, who were to be lifelong friends, worked their way to Buffalo, then to Detroit, Chicago and eventually to the banks of the Mississippi River. D. D. and T. J. were reunited with their family two months and fifteen days after they left their Canadian home.<sup>3</sup>

D. D. became a schoolmaster in Muscatine, Iowa,

eight months after he arrived in the Midwest. It was the first of a number of teaching assignments he held in various Iowa counties. In 1871, by then a well-seasoned teacher, he moved to New Boston, Ill., where he educated 53 youngsters in the intermediate department of the community school.<sup>4</sup>

During the winter term of school, Palmer married Abba Lord. The marriage was performed by a Justice of the Peace on January 20, 1871. On November 8th of the same year, D. D. and his wife purchased ten acres of land a number of miles north of New Boston. The small plot was sold to D. D. for ten dollars an acre. It was a relatively inexpensive acquisition. Most good farm land was priced at about sixty dollars an acre at the time.<sup>5</sup>

The reason for the low price is simply explained. The property was on a steep hillside which sloped sharply to the sloughs of the Mississippi River. Worthless for farming, it was ideal for the next passage of D. D. Palmer's life.<sup>6</sup>

D. D. at one time commented, "... my father was disposed to reason on the subjects pertaining to life." It is evident that he learned well from his father because he promptly used his ten acres of land to build an extensive apiary as well as a plant nursery. Palmer maintained tight notes on his operations. On July 26, 1877, a journal entry states, "3,333 lbs. boxes honey off and 700 hundred slung honey, 183 hives." Later that same year, "Took car load of honey - 18,600 lbs. - to New York City - car cost \$232 - done fair." The beekeeping enterprise ended in 1881. According to D. D.'s notes, "Jan. 10, 26 below 0, was 30 below once . . . Apr. 14, 20. Bees all dead."<sup>7</sup>

Palmer was resourceful in his nursery operation. He sold raspberry and blackberry bushes virtually all over the nation. D. D. advertised extensively, and testimonies glowed over Palmer's superior products. One plant, Sweet Home Raspberry, sold for twenty-five cents each; one dozen for \$1.25. Other varieties sold for as little as sixty cents per dozen.<sup>8</sup>

It was during this time, D. D. Palmer became interested in Spiritualism, a religion which had proliferated across the nation. He engaged in many discussions with townspeople on Spiritualism and used the topic in his advertising. A 40-page booklet which he

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had published alternately carried advertising material along with his religious views.

On October 7, 1874, Mercer County, Illinois, records indicate D. D. married Louvenia Landers. There is no indication as to what happened to his first wife. County records have no reference, although, some accounts indicate she may have died in childbirth.<sup>9</sup>

On December 31, 1881, Daniel David Palmer sold his Mercer County property. Now thirty-six years old, he and his wife moved to What Cheer where he opened a grocery store, the ninth one in the booming coal town in eastern Iowa. Here, too, were D. D.'s parents, brothers and sisters. T. J. was publisher of the *What Cheer Patriot*. Prior to this time, T. J. had also taught school, sold insurance, peddled books, and had owned and edited the *Greenfield, Iowa, Patriot* and the *Muscatine, Iowa, Patriot*.<sup>10</sup> Undoubtedly, D. D. found great personal comfort in being near his family, especially his brother.

Apparently competition was keen in What Cheer because D. D., despite all of his best efforts, found it necessary to return to school teaching. He and his family moved to Letts, Iowa, and it was here on November 20, 1884 that Louvenia died. Surviving her were Frank Palmer, age eleven and a son by a previous marriage; May Palmer, eight; Jessie Palmer, six, and Bartlett Joshua Palmer, two, who was born in What Cheer prior to the family move to Letts.<sup>11</sup>

Six months after Louvenia's death, D. D. remarried. On May 5, 1885, he took as his bride, Martha A. Henning, age 26. Trenchant as he may have been, Palmer most likely found it necessary to get a new wife as soon as possible to take care of his young family.<sup>12</sup>

During this time that D. D. had been teaching and in other activities, a man by the name of Paul Caster was practicing magnetic healing in Ottumwa, Iowa, relatively near What Cheer. Caster's practice was phenomenal according to newspaper accounts of the day. His effectiveness was reported in fulgent terms:

"... patients who have been bedridden for years and others who had for so long been hobbling about on crutches as to have lost all hope of health or soundness, have gone from him like the lame man at the beautiful gate of the temple, 'walking and leaping and praising God' ..."<sup>13</sup>

Because D. D. was naturally inquisitive and read voraciously, news of Paul Caster's healing practice must have been quick to reach him. Interested in "subjects pertaining to life," there was a natural attraction toward the "magnetic" and Caster's work. Palmer studied magnetic healing, packed up his family and opened an office in Burlington, Iowa.

Burlington was a bustling river town along the Mississippi. D. D. opened his suite of offices in the downtown area on Jefferson Street.<sup>14</sup> Professional rooms

were located in the front portion of the building while living quarters were in the rear. According to his journal, D. D. began seeing patients on Friday, September 3, 1886.

Competition was keen. Along with Palmer's name in the city directory, there was quite a number of other healers including those of the allopathic, eclectic, homeopathic, botanic and occultist schools.<sup>15</sup>

There are few indications as to the success of his practice. The Palmer family may have had some reservations. A loose page in his journal has been preserved. It is a note to his youngest brother, Bartlett D. Dated October 13, 1886, it reads:

"Three rules to be observed that success may attend you. First: Do not be deceived by women, three times have they been a curse morally, physically and financially. Second: The Less you talk the more you will accomplish and the greater importance will be attached to your words. Third: Remember you did not come here for your health or glory alone, it will not feed you or your children."<sup>16</sup>

The first and third points seem to indicate Martha had already left the marriage. Under what circumstances is unknown because public records do not carry the information.

D. D.'s practice did not remain long in Burlington for he soon moved to Davenport, just upriver. The 1887 Davenport City Directory lists:

D. D. Palmer  
Cures Without Medicine  
Ryan Block Building  
Publisher of "The Educator"

A dark legal cloud was over Palmer's head almost the moment he moved to Davenport. Sued to collect an unpaid promissory note, records indicate the sheriff made a levy on his household goods to satisfy the claim.<sup>17</sup>

D. D.'s practice grew quickly. His finances improved and an advertising program was quickly mounted. In 1888, Palmer listed his advertising expenses. He had 30,000 circulars and cards printed as well as distributed for \$75. A ferry boat sign cost \$7.00. A hundred photos were priced at \$9.00. Two signs measuring three by four feet were \$7.75. D. D. also included six pieces of furniture, for \$80.00 and carpet for \$33.85. Excluding the furniture, but including several other signs and newspaper ads, his promotion expenses for the year totalled less than \$150.00.<sup>18</sup>

On November 6, 1888, D. D. again walked the marital path. He married Villa Amanda Thomas of Rock Island, Illinois.<sup>19</sup> She was thirty-nine years old and it was her first marriage. Later, D. D. lauded her for all of the assistance she gave him in his practice. At best, Villa may have found her new role physically taxing. She had received a spinal injury as a result of a runaway team of



horses and an overturned carriage in which she had been riding. Consequently, Villa was constantly in pain.<sup>20</sup>

D. D. Palmer's "golden decade" had begun. His fame spread throughout eastern Iowa and western Illinois. He readily admitted having detractors and was quick to plunge into a battle of words:

"There is one great difference in the application of magnetism and medicine. Magnetism is applied directly to the part of the diseased; but with drugs, the poor stomach has to take the dose, whether guilty or not." Under a banner headline in one of his brochures, D. D. proclaimed:

"Vaccination is a Medical Delusion of the Nineteenth Century.

The propagation of disease, on the pretext of thereby arresting disease is outside the range of science, bad in logic, wicked in morals and murderous in practice."<sup>21</sup>

As time passed, D. D. expanded his facilities in the Ryan Building. He leased the entire fourth floor of the structure for his practice, which included room and board for patients. With the expansion, he now had a total of twenty-four rooms. The outside of the Ryan Building had a large sign. According to a Davenport newspaper:

"Dr. Palmer's Magnetic Cure had the longest gold lettered sign in the city. It contains 205 gold letters and is 138 feet long. This splendid sign was done by Hoehn of this city."

When the local medical society called for a special meeting to pass a resolution opposing an anti-vivisection bill which had been introduced into the United States Congress, D. D. painted a graphic picture against the practice. He wrote,

"Vivisection is the dissecting or skinning alive, burning, boiling of animals alive. They are slowly as possible put to death by mutilation and torturing. Thousands of

horses, dogs, cats, rabbits, guinea pigs and monkeys suffer untold hours of agony by the cruel, bloodthirsty hands of vivisectors. Pet dogs and cats are often stolen by students for this purpose of dissecting them alive."<sup>22</sup>

Also reported in the newspapers was Palmer's extensive collection of mounted animal heads, antlers and horns reputedly worth thousands of dollars. These specimen were hung throughout hallways and in his reception room. D. D. was proud of his collation of trophies. Not missing a bet, he stated to a newspaper reporter that he would be pleased to show his specimens to anyone coming to the office in the afternoon or evening. School children were especially welcomed.<sup>23</sup>

Palmer's office hours were from 1 to 6 p.m., "unless otherwise arranged for." As patients would come into his suite, each would take a number from a hook. When the number was called by an attendant, the patient would go into another room to see D. D. It apparently made no difference to the healer if the patient was rich or poor. Everyone waited for their number. Davenport's downtown magnetic healer saw about ninety to a hundred patients a day.<sup>24</sup>

Each year which passed saw D. D. Palmer more successful. While voices of protest against magnetic healing became louder and louder, so were the plaudits in favor of the unique health treatment. Palmer was truly in his personal "golden decade", a decade in which there would be a startlingly new discovery which would lead him along new paths in his personal crusade for acceptance and recognition. On September 18, 1895, D. D. Palmer performed the "first chiropractic adjustment."

From that moment, D. D. Palmer promoted chiropractic, and by his account carefully delineated the new profession's philosophy, science and art, and in so doing became recognized throughout the world as the innovating force which introduced a new scientific revolution in the healing arts.

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<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*

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